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ABSTRACT

The Dial-A-Teacher Assistance project (DATALINE) is a telephone resource center which provides assistance or information to parents and pupils about problems related to homework, as well as information about Parent Partnership activities and services available to parents and children in the School District of Philadelphia. The theory behind the program is that pupils and/or parents encounter problems doing homework, and that often no agency is available where they may obtain assistance during the evening hours. Eight teachers with expertise in various curriculum areas are assigned to answer phones. The subject with the greatest number of calls is elementary mathematics, followed by English and language arts. Teachers assist pupils from public, private, and parochial schools and from various grade levels. Adults often call to assist their children in understanding and completing homework assignments, or they may be engaged in continuing education programs. The success of DATALINE is an indication that parents are concerned with the education of their children and that many children are interested in learning, even after school. At present, DATALINE is one the most inexpensive methods of tutoring large numbers of pupils.
(Author/RLV)

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An Analysis of
The Dial-A-Teacher Assistance Program (DATALINE)
School District of Philadelphia

By William R. Blackwell, Ed.D.

Presented to
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An Analysis of
The Dial-A-Teacher Assistance Program (DATALINE)
School District of Philadelphia

By William R. Blackwell, Ed.D.

The Dail-A-Teacher Assistance project is a telephone resource center which provides assistance or information to parent and pupils related to school work brought home by students, as well as information about Parent Partnership activities and services available to parents and children in the School District of Philadelphia.

The Dial-A-Teacher Assistance (DATA) Line program began as an idea of Dr. Michael P. Marcase, Superintendent, School District of Philadelphia, as an extension of the Parent Partnership Program. Dr. Marcase feels that a key element in a total education package is to provide parents with the information, skills and tools needed to make them full partners in the educational process of their children. DATALINE gives parents and pupils an opportunity to have professional school assistance in their homes, after school hours, by dialing a telephone number in their community. The first DATALINE program was sponsored by the School District of Philadelphia, funded by a $32,000 grant from the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title IV-C.

The program was in operation for seventeen (17) weeks and community response was overwhelming. During the initial phases of the program, demand for telephone pupil assistance exceeded all expectations and additional telephones and personnel had to be added to meet the increased demand.

During the first weeks of operation (February - March, 1979) DATALINE was staffed by supervisory personnel from the various curriculum offices of the School District of Philadelphia. In the course of this "starting-up" period, the Philadelphia news media provided printed and television news coverage of the program's operation and disseminated it throughout the Delaware Valley. Throughout this time of media coverage, DATALINE logged approximately 200 calls per evening. As the media publicity increased, the number of calls increased as well as the distance from which the calls originated. National news coverage increased the range of DATALINE operation. Radio talk programs from nearly every region of the country expressed an interest in the operation of the program. As a result of this publicity, additional personnel had to be hired to handle the increased volume of calls. Gradually, supervisory personnel were replaced by personnel recruited from the teacher ranks. These teachers answered telephone questions from the sixth to the seventeenth week of operation. Teachers will also be answering telephones throughout the 1979-80 school year.

The theory behind the program is that pupils and/or parents encounter problems doing homework and often no agency is available where they may obtain assistance during the evening hours. As a result of this apparent need, the DATALINE program was initiated. A bank of eight telephones, located in the Pedigogical Library of the School District's Administration Building, along with the reference materials located within easy access of teachers answering telephones, comprise the foundation of the DATALINE program.

Eight teachers are assigned to answer telephones. There are four teachers handling incoming calls and four teachers handling outgoing calls. These teachers have expertise in the curriculum areas of; mathematics, social studies, science, foreign languages (French and Spanish), English, elementary curriculum, language arts/reading, and a curriculum specialist/supervisor. Combined their expertise provides the basis for a resource team that is capable of providing educational assistance to all but the most sophisticated of problems. Problems referred to DATALINE that are not answered by the team are researched by the appropriate curriculum department within the School District, or referred to an outside agency for assistance and/or resolution.

Pupils call DATALINE because they are not familiar with the process for bringing a homework problem to a successful

conclusion. Often the pupil has forgotten or is not sure which procedure should be employed to solve a particular problem. Discussing the problem individually with a teacher, who has expertise in that field, often gives the student the necessary clues to arrive at the correct conclusion. Also the anonymity of the situation often provides a less threatening atmosphere for some pupils to respond, thus making it possible to explore the basis of the individual's problem or understanding.

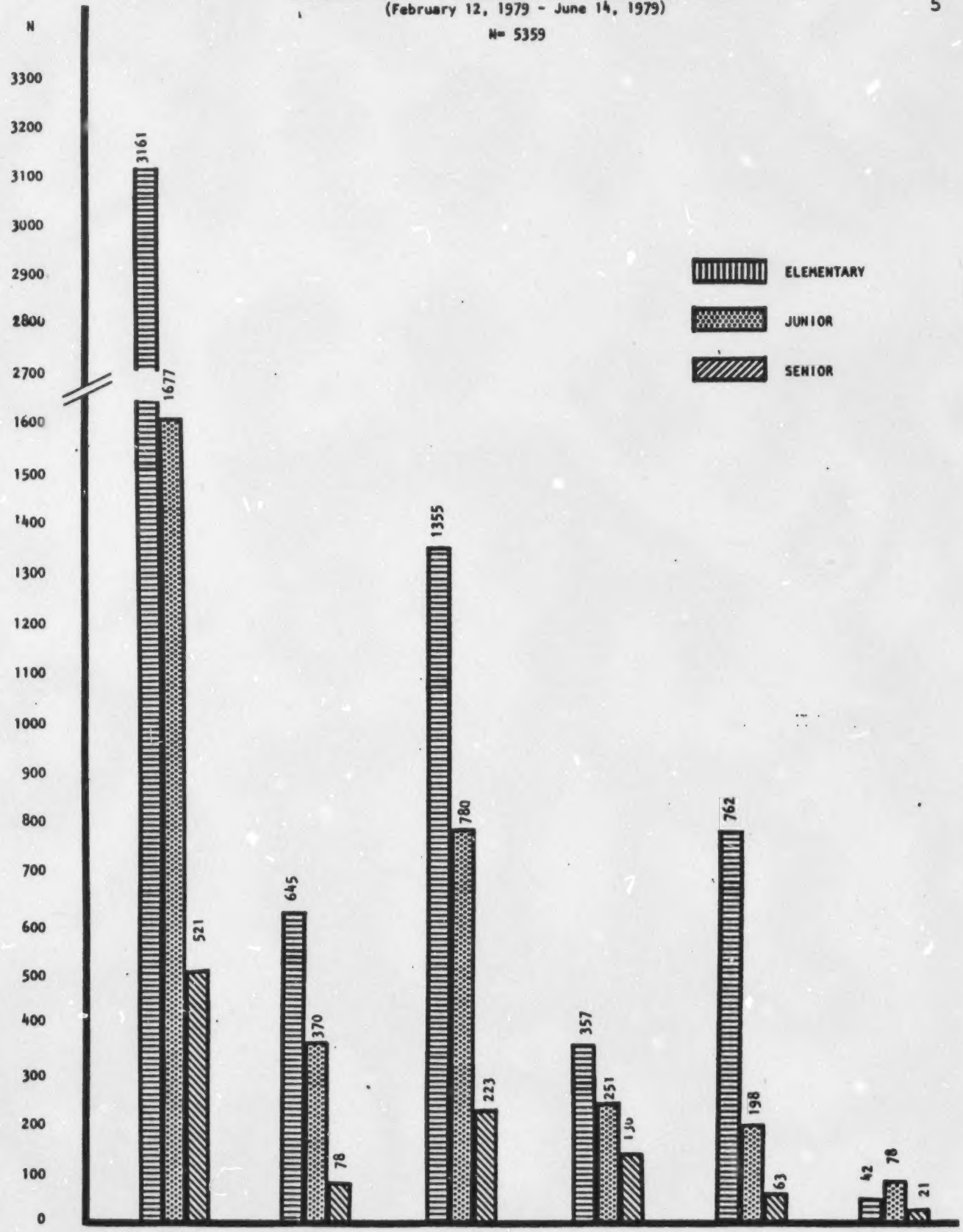
Ninety-five percent of the calls received by DATALINE are from pupils within the Delaware Valley, but on occasion calls are received for assistance from as far away as Tocoma, Washington.

The subject area which received the greatest number of calls was elementary mathematics (see p.5). All teachers who answer telephones were knowledgable in the fundamentals of mathematics. This knowledge allows specialist mathematics teachers to handle the more complex secondary problems, thus allowing a greater number of pupils to be received.

English/language arts/reading was the second most popular area. Here again the elementary school pupils called more frequently than secondary pupils. As in the case of elementary mathematics, teachers answering telephones were expected to answer fundamental language arts problems. The more complex English questions were answered by specialist teachers in the field.

ESEA TITLE IV-C
NUMBER OF CALLS BY SUBJECT AREAS FOR THREE GRADE LEVELS
(February 12, 1979 - June 14, 1979)

N= 5359



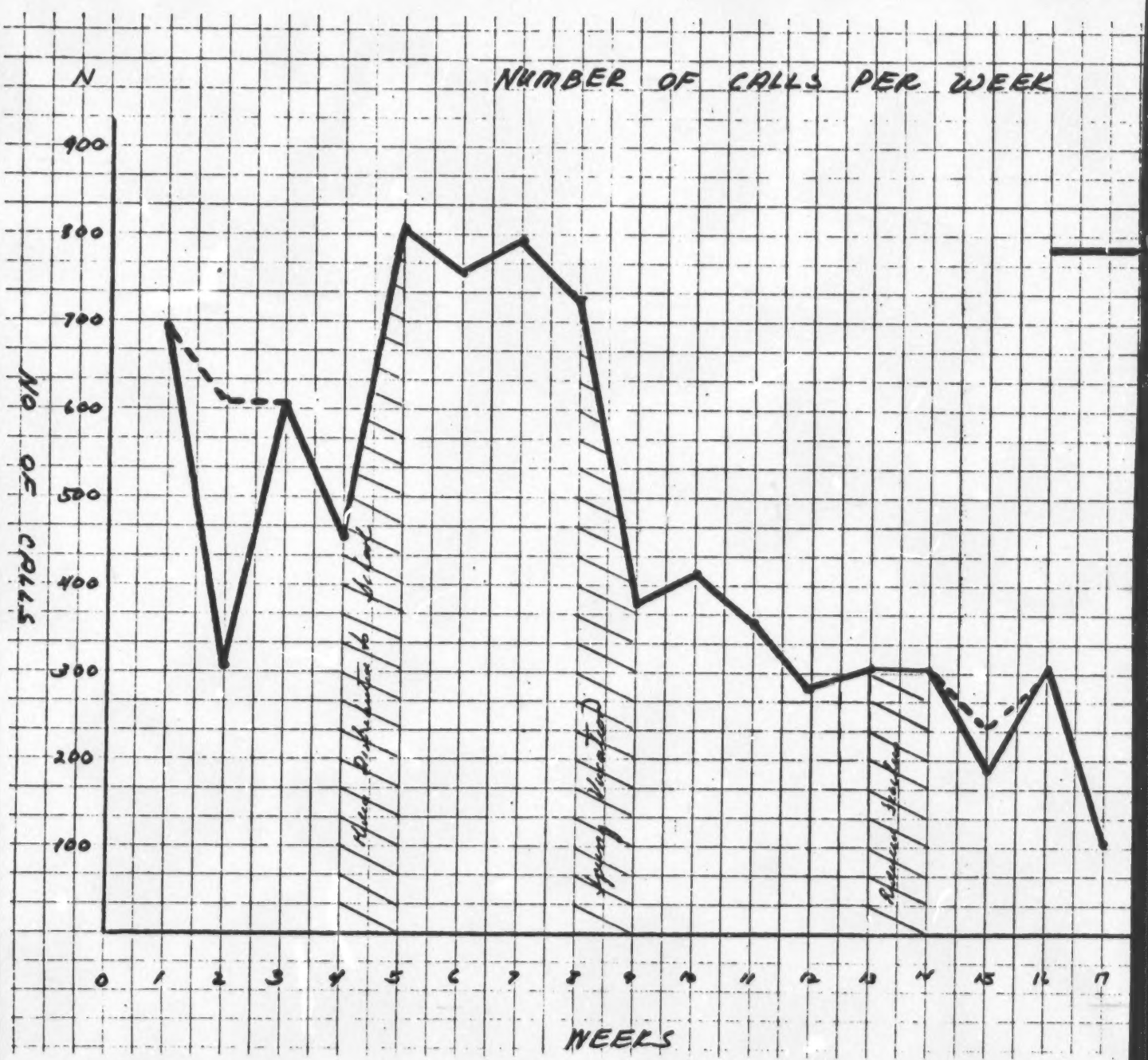
ORE/APEU 6/79

The overwhelming majority of questions in science and foreign language were referred to specialist teachers from the respective fields. The science questions were usually complex, requiring detailed explanations. In some cases a science inquiry may take as long as ten minutes to answer, thus resulting in the low volume of calls.

Foreign language also experienced a low volume of calls. This may be due to foreign language being offered to mainly academic or college preparatory students. It could thus be reasoned that a lower volume of telephone calls would result because of the small specialized population involved. Many of these same pupils may be calling DATALINE for assistance in mathematics or science. The 1979-80 results indicate that foreign language is growing in popularity.

Most social studies questions are referred to the social science specialist. These teachers answer questions in history, economics, government, geography, psychology, religion sociology, and current events. They even do intermediate mathematics problems when the occasion arises. DATALINE teachers must be versatile, because one may be called upon to answer questions from almost any field.

After the spring recess of 1979, the number of telephone calls declined dramatically (see p. 7). This decline was attributed to (1) the various times neighboring school districts


NUMBER OF CALLS PER WEEK
N
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
NO OF CALLS
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17
WEEKS

dismissed for vacation, (2) the decrease in media publicity, and (3) the onset of warmer weather and longer hours of daylight which was believed to have made many pupils delay attempting homework assignments before 8 p.m. The weather had a significant effect on the volume of calls during the spring months. When the weather was fair and warm, the volume of calls decreased, when the weather was inclement, the volume of calls increased. These events necessitated a reduction in teacher services after the thirteenth week of operation. For a two week period at the end of May (weeks 15-16), telephone activity again increased, but not as sharply as during the fourth and fifth weeks. The volume of calls did not increase as sharply possibly because a large number of calls could not be processed by the reduced staff. This surge in calls was attributed to final examinations prior to the ending of school.

DATALINE teachers assist pupils from public, parochial and private schools. Pupils who use the service are from grades as low as kindergarten and as high as college. Adults often call to assist their children in understanding and completing their home assignments, or they may be engaged in continuing education programs.

Parents usually call because they need to be reacquainted with the new educational jargon, or the appropriate process

used to find the solution to a problem. Before parents are able to assist their children, the confusion concerning the process must be removed from their minds. Once the parent and/or the child gains insight into the solution, they express their gratefulness and set about solving similar problems on their own. This method of tutoring provides a wonderful opportunity for the parent and the child to communicate about relevant topics without the parent feeling threatened, due to their lack of knowledge. The philosophy of the Parent Partnership Program is to have the parent assist their children at home. The DATALINE component of the Parent Partnership Program provides parents with a ready resource that may be utilized during the evening. By telephoning a central number it is possible for the parent to extend classroom instruction into their home. When parents were asked their opinion of the program, they often respond, "I wish this service was available when I was in school."

The summary of calls from February, 12, 1979 to June 14, 1979, indicate that 7,774 calls were processed by the DATALINE staff (see p.10). The mean for the seventeen week period was 457.24 calls per week.

The 1979-80 DATALINE program began on September 17, 1979. During the course of the first week, four teachers processed

SUMMARY OF DATA LINE CALLS
February 12, 1979 - June 14, 1979

1. Caller: Child 6828 (88%)
Adult 761 (10%)
Both 185 (2%)

2. CAP : 1276 (16%) (85% occurred during the 1st eight weeks of operation)
3. Error : 304 (4%) (95% occurred during the 1st eight weeks of operation)

4. Calls by subject areas:

	N	%
Social Studies	1714	22.1
Math	3175	40.9
(Elementary 1980 25.5)		
(Secondary 1195 15.4)		
Science	857	11.0
Foreign Languages	189	2.4
Reading/English/Language Arts	1409	18.1
Other	430	5.5
TOTAL	7774	100.0

5. Calls by grade levels (N = 5359):

Elementary	3161	59.0
(K-3 575)		
(4-6 2586)		
Junior/Middle	1677	31.3
High School	521	9.7

6. Day of week:

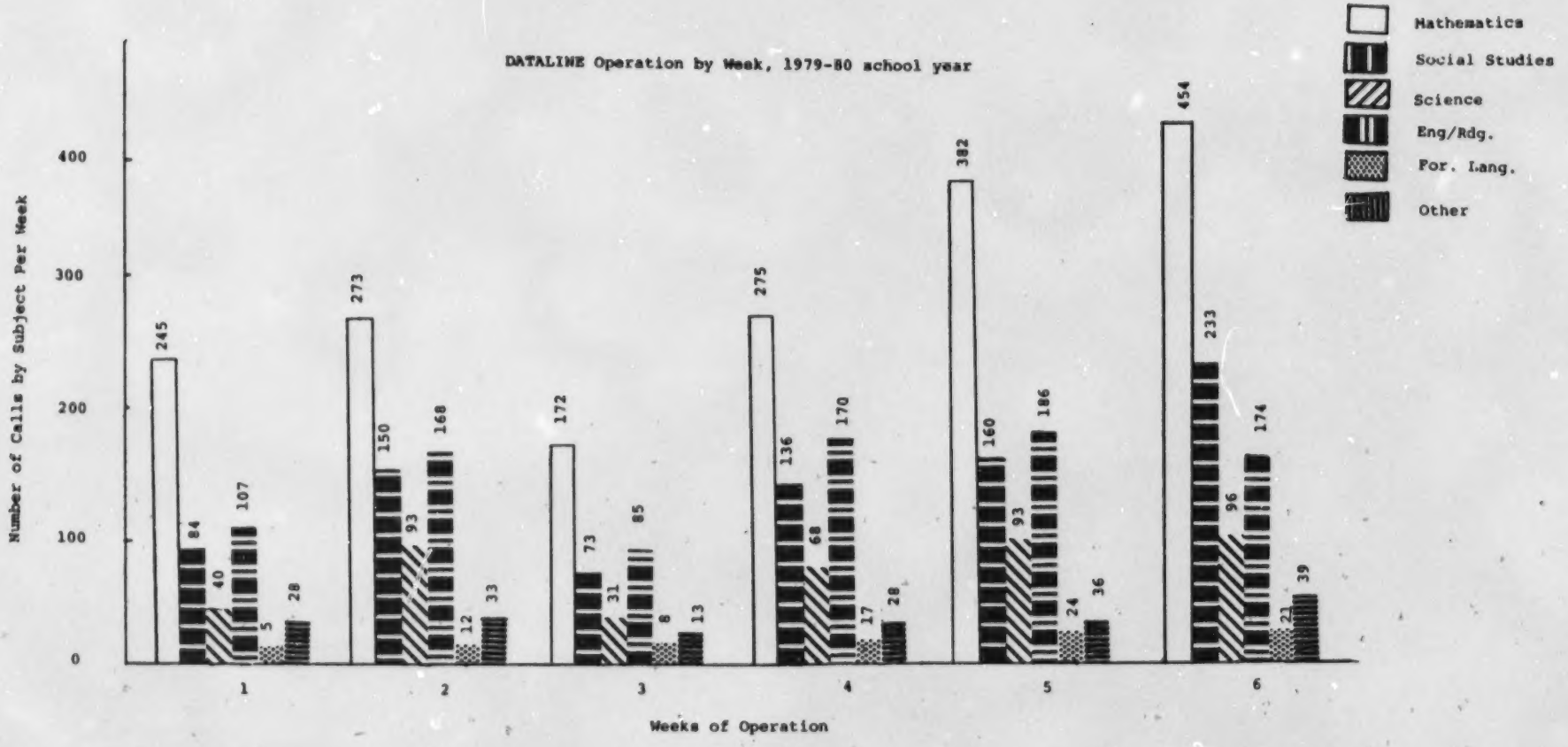
Monday	1737	22.3
Tuesday	2155	27.7
Wednesday	1939	24.9
Thrusday	1943	25.0

7. Calls referred:

	N	%
Parent Partnership	17	26.2
Adult Education	6	9.2
Content questions referred to curriculum office	12	18.5
Request for materials from curriculum office	7	10.8
Information about programs or SD's position on issues	12	18.5
Parents' request for additional services for their child	11	16.9
TOTAL	65	100.0

569 calls. Again, mathematics was the most popular area of requests (see p.12). As news of DATALINE'S renewed operation spread, the volume of calls increased in all areas. By the third week of operation additional personnel was hired bringing the total staff to nine per shift to accommodate the increased volume of calls. The decreased number of calls during the third week of operation reflect two days when schools were closed, while the fourth week reflects a three day week instead of the usual four day operation. After six weeks of operation DATALINE had responded to approximately 4,250 telephone calls. This total is well ahead of the rate established in the first year of operation. The total number of calls received during the first seventeen weeks of operation were 7,774. The first six weeks of operation of the 1979-80 school year totaled 4,250 calls, which is 55 percent of the total for the first year. This would indicate an approximate 60 percent increase in the volume of calls over the first year's total volume.

When the telephone logs were divided into three one hour time periods and analyzed for the first six weeks of operation, the results indicated that the 5:00-6:00 time period logged 1,579 calls; followed by the 6:00-7:00 period, 1,384 calls; and finally 1,212 calls for the 7:00-8:00 period. The difference in total calls between the 5-6 and the 6-7 time periods (195 calls)


DATALINE Operation by Week, 1979-80 school year
Number of Calls by Subject Per Week
Weeks of Operation
Mathematics
Social Studies
Science
Eng/Rdg.
For. Lang.
Other
0
100
200
300
400
1
2
3
4
5
6
245
84
40
107
5
28
273
150
93
168
12
33
172
73
31
85
8
13
275
136
68
170
17
28
382
160
93
186
24
36
454
233
96
174
21
39

may be attributed to younger children calling to complete homework assignments early in the evening, while secondary students call later. Secondary pupils who availed themselves of the DATALINE service in the past were encouraged to call earlier in the evening to ensure having their question(s) answered. When the 5-6 time period was compared to the 7-8 period, the greatest difference in the number of calls processed appeared (367). Such a large discrepancy may be attributed to four possible causes; (1) the complexity of the questions, (2) fatigue of the staff, (3) decrease in the number of callers, or (4) a combination of all of the above. It would appear that the number of calls answered is directly proportional to the number of teachers answering telephones. At this point DATALINE has not reached its optimum operating capacity. Many pupils are still unable to be serviced because of limited facilities.

The Dial-A-Teacher Assistance program expanded to include a Spanish component for the 1979-80 school year. The "LINEA DIRECTA" program was initiated to assist the Spanish speaking community of Philadelphia with problems related to education. LINEA DIRECTA has the potential of being as successful as its English component DATALINE, although the initial volume of calls are below expectations. In order to stimulate LINEA DIRECTA, an extensive media campaign directed at the Spanish speaking community has been launched. Hopefully, the volume of calls will increase.

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

WEEK 1. Time 5:00 to 6:00

Subject	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	7	7	5	7	26
Reading/English	15	15	10	14	54
Science	3	4	8	2	17
Mathematics Elem/Sec	8/6	6/10	16/10	16/9	46/35
For. Lang.	0	0	0	1	1
Other*	0	4	2	4	10
Total	39	46	51	53	189

WEEK 2	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	17	13	19	12	61
Reading/English	16	20	19	5	60
Science	9	8	15	5	37
Mathematics Elem/Sec	25/6	18/11	27/6	20/4	90/27
For. Lang.	1	1	3	0	5
Other*	3	4	1	2	10
Total	77	75	90	48	290

Week 3	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies		10		18	28
Reading/English	NO	10	NO	19	29
Science	SCHOOL	6	SCHOOL	13	19
Mathematics Elem/Sec		15/3		31/11	46/14
For. Lang.		0		2	2
Other*		4		6	10
Total		48		100	148

* Parent Partnership and general program information

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

WEEK 4 — Time 5:00 to 6:00

Subject	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies		16	12	19	47
Reading/English	NO	31	16	28	75
Science	SCHOOL	8	8	8	24
Mathematics Elem/Sec		25/10	11/16	26/11	62/37
For. Lang.		2	0	2	4
Other*		6	0	0	6
Total		98	63	94	255

WEEK 5	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	11	17	14	13	55
Reading/English	27	17	21	17	82
Science	2	10	9	10	31
Mathematics Elem/Sec	12/23	33/6	21/8	21/11	87/48
For. Lang.	0	2	2	3	7
Other*	4	4	3	1	12
Total	79	89	78	76	322

Week 6	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	26	28	15	19	88
Reading/English	19	19	29	10	77
Science	7	7	15	8	37
Mathematics Elem/Sec	20/8	27/12	35/9	26/13	108/42
For. Lang.	1	1	5	2	9
Other*	1	5	5	3	14
Total	82	99	113	81	375

* Parent Partnership and general program information

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

WEEK 1 Time 6:00 - 7:00

Subject	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	5	8	7	8	28
Reading/English	6	5	9	8	28
Science	4	2	4	2	12
Mathematics Elem/Sec	5/12	8/10	17/6	21/7	51/35
For. Lang.	0	2	0	2	4
Other*	2	3	3	3	11
Total	34	38	46	51	169

WEEK 2	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	17	14	7	16	54
Reading/English	17	10	8	7	42
Science	5	14	10	3	32
Mathematics Elem/Sec	17/7	12/4	14/2	18/3	61/16
For. Lang.	1	0	3	0	4
Other*	1	4	3	6	14
Total	65	58	47	53	223

Week 3	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies		3		19	22
Reading/English	N O	14	N O	19	33
Science	S C	2	S C	4	6
Mathematics Elem/Sec	H O O	20/8	H O O	28/13	48/21
For. Lang.	L	0	L	2	2
Other*		1		2	3
Total		48		87	135

* Parent Partnership and general program information

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

Time 6:00 to 7:00

WEEK 4

Subject		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	NO SCHOOL		16	13	15	44
Reading/English			15	10	22	47
Science			6	6	4	16
Mathematics Elem/Sec			33/9	10/17	22/7	65/33
For. Lang.			1	0	2	3
Other*			8	3	0	11
Total			88	59	72	219

WEEK 5	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	11	15	10	12	48
Reading/English	14	10	13	20	57
Science	9	5	6	7	27
Mathematics Elem/Sec	14/14	23/19	27/11	21/13	85/57
For. Lang.	3	1	2	2	8
Other*	3	3	5	3	14
Total	68	76	74	78	296

Week 6	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	16	14	17	28	75
Reading/English	14	8	16	16	54
Science	7	6	8	8	29
Mathematics Elem/Sec	17/11	31/16	31/11	29/18	108/56
For. Lang.	2	1	2	0	5
Other*	1	3	6	5	15
Total	68	79	91	104	342

* Parent Partnership and general program information

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

WEEK 1 Time 7:00 - 8:00

Subject	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	3	4	10	8	25
Reading/English	1	6	11	7	25
Science	0	3	4	4	11
Mathematics Elem/Sec	4/3	10/18	21/3	25/4	60/28
For. Lang.	0	0	0	0	0
Other*	0	2	1	4	7
Total	11	43	50	52	156

WEEK 2	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	16	11	6	12	45
Reading/English	18	9	9	13	49
Science	7	8	3	6	24
Mathematics Elem/Sec	10/3	9/9	10/5	17/6	46/23
For. Lang.	1	1	0	1	3
Other*	3	2	2	2	9
Total	58	49	35	57	199

Week 3	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies		2		16	18
Reading/English	NO	6	NO	17	23
Science	SCHOOL	1	SCHOOL	4	5
Mathematics Elem/Sec		14/8		18/3	32/11
For. Lang.		1		2	3
Other*		1		2	3
Total		33		62	45

* Parent Partnership and general program information

DAILY ANALYSIS DATALINE 1979-80

WEEK 4 — Time 7:00 to 8:00

Subject	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	NO SCHOOL	10	13	14	45
Reading/English		17	16	17	50
Science		12	9	7	28
Mathematics Elem/Sec		13/6	7/16	20/11	45/33
For. Lang.		2	3	7	12
Other*		11	0	0	11
Total		84	64	76	224

WEEK 5	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	13	17	6	21	57
Reading/English	12	13	8	14	47
Science	3	7	8	13	31
Mathematics Elem/Sec	10/13	11/0	16/5	22/13	59/31
For. Lang.	2	1	4	2	9
Other*	1	4	3	0	8
Total	54	53	50	85	242

Week 6	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Total
Social Studies	17	16	19	18	70
Reading/English	14	11	12	6	43
Science	4	9	8	9	30
Mathematics Elem/Sec	17/11	29/4	28/9	26/16	100/40
For. Lang.	2	1	2	2	7
Other*	2	3	6	5	16
Total	67	73	84	82	306

* Parent Partnership and general program information

It is the policy of DATALINE NOT TO COMPLETE PUPIL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS. What the teacher does is: (1) help pupils understand the concepts with which they are working; (2) refer pupils to supplementary materials to extend their knowledge of the concept; (3) lead pupils to alternate solutions to their problems; (4) assist pupils in locating sources of information; or (5) assist pupils in identifying problems and initiating the proper process for bringing the problem to a successful conclusion.

The success of the Dial-A-Teacher Assistance program is one indication that parents are interested in the education of their children and many children are interested in learning, even after school. Today, education is a life-long continous process and schools must constantly explore new techniques to reach their clients. Presently, DATALINE is one of the most inexpensive methods of tutoring large numbers of pupils that has been widely publicized.

DATALINE is believed to be the first program of its kind in the United States. Information has been requested from school districts, school board members, school superintendents, Congressmen, and concerned parents in the implementation and operation of the program. DATALINE information was also requested from Canada, Australia, England and Tasmania.

In order to start a similar program in your area you should first determine the need for such a program; second, the geographic area to be served; third, the curriculum to be covered; and fourth, the funding source.

In the Delaware Valley, parents students and teachers are pleased with the DATALINE service. DATALINE handles approximately 200 calls per evening. The program is in operation between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday when schools in the School District of Philadelphia are in session.